

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAM-01

SAB-01 OMB-01 SSM-03 IO-13 ACDA-07 SCCT-01 /096 W

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P R 011037Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1409

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USINT BAGHDAD

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 6744

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, PINS, LE, SY, MILI

SUBJECT: PROSPECTS FOR THE DAMASCUS CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT ON LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 6717

1. SUMMARY: THE LATEST CEASEFIRE IN THE LEBANESE WAR, THE 55TH ACCORDING TO PIERRE GEMAYEL, HAS BEEN GREETED IN LEBANON WITH A GREAT LACK OF ENTHUSIASM. IT HAS COME NOT BECAUSE ALL OF THE WARRING PARTIES ARE READY TO MAKE PEACE, BUT BECAUSE ALL NEED A RESPITE. FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS DESCRIBE ATTITUDES OF VARIOUS FACTIONS IN LEBANON AND, ASSUMING AGREEMENT IS STILL ALIVE IN SPITE OF CONFUSION CREATED BY REFERENCE TO SINAI II IN ACCOMPANYING JOINT STATEMENT, ASSESSES ITS CHANCES OF BEING IMPLEMENTED. END SUMMARY.

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2. THE PLO IN LEBANON, WHICH HAS BEEN BADLY MAULED IN RECENT MONTHS, NEEDS TIME TO REARM AND REGROUP. THE CEASEFIRE WITH SYRIANS GIVES THEM TIME THEY NEED TO RECEIVE AND INTEGRATE ARMS AND POSSIBLY NEW RECRUITS BEING SUPPLIED TO THEM BY LIBYA AND EGYPT AND PERHAPS OTHER COUNTRIES. ARAFAT MAY ALSO THINK HE WILL HAVE A NEW OPPORTUNITY TO TRY TO REASSERT HIS LEADERSHIP OVER VARIOUS PALESTINIAN GROUPS. HOWEVER, REJECTIONIST PALESTINIANS ARE AS DETERMINED AS EVER TO PROVOKE RENEWED FIGHTING, AND MAY IN FACT SUCCEED IN PULLING ARAFAT IN THEIR DIRECTION RATHER THAN VICE VERSA.

3. FOR THE SYRIANS, THE CEASEFIRE IS USEFUL FOR BOTH POLITICAL AND MILITARY REASONS: POLITICALLY, TO ASSURE THAT THEY DO NOT LOSE BASIC MILITARY SUPPORT FROM THE SOVIET UNION AND TO PREVENT ESTRANGEMENT FROM SOME ARAB COUNTRIES; MILITARILY, TO GAIN TIME TO BUILD UP A NEW CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM LEBANESE ARMY, UNDER THEIR CONTROL, TO "LEBANIZE" THE CONFLICT. SYRIA'S POSITION IN LEBANON IS EXTREMELY DELICATE: IF THEY WITHDRAW FROM SAFAR AND JESSINE, WHICH IS MINIMUM DEMANDED BY LEBANESE LEFTIST MOSLEM GROUPS AND PALESTINIAN REJECTIONISTS, AND GENERALLY REDUCE THEIR SUPPORT FOR CHRISTIAN FORCES, THEY MAY LOSE CONTROL OF MILITARY SITUATION AS WELL AS SOME OF THE INFLUENCE THEY NOW HAVE WITH THE CHRISTIAN GROUPS. IF THEY CONTINUE TO OCCUPY LEBANESE POSITIONS THEY HAVE TAKEN, AND INCREASE THEIR SUPPLY OF MILITARY EQUIPMENT TO PHALANGIST FORCES, THEY WILL BE ACCUSED BY LEBANESE LEFT AND MANY PALESTINIANS OF VIOLATING SPIRIT IF NOT THE LETTER OF DAMASCUS CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT.

4. THE VARIOUS CHRISTIAN PARTIES ALSO REGARD LATEST CEASEFIRE WITH SUSPICION. CHAMOUN HAS GRUMBLED THAT IT CONSTITUTES UNACCEPTABLE INTERFERENCE IN LEBANON'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS BUT HAS NOT ATTACKED IT DIRECTLY. THIS IS PROBABLY BECAUSE OF PRESSURE FROM SYRIANS AND HIS WEAKENED DOMESTIC POSITION AS RESULT OF BROWLING  
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BETWEEN HIS FORCES AND PHALANGE. NEVERTHELESS, CHAMOUN AND HIS BULLY-BOYS CAN STILL PLAY A SPOILER ROLE AND WILL UNDOUBTEDLY DO SO AS SOON AS THEY FEEL STRONG ENOUGH.

5. GEMAYEL, AFTER POINTING OUT THAT AGREEMENT CONTAINS NOTHING NEW, HAS EXPRESSED PIOUS HOPES THAT "THE CRISIS WILL SOON FIND A SOLUTION," BUT IN HIS VIEW

THIS SOLUTION INCLUDES REDISTRIBUTION OF MOST OF THE PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON THROUGHOUT THE ARAB WORLD-- AND UNLIKELY PROSPECT. FROM MILITARY POINT OF VIEW, PHALANGISTS MAY BE WILLING TO LIVE WITH THE CEASEFIRE FOR A TIME WHILE THEY CONTINUE TO RECEIVE ARMS FROM SYRIANS (AND ISRAELIS). THEY MAY ALSO HOPE THAT THE CEASEFIRE WILL PROVIDE A FACE-SAVING OCCASION FOR PLO TO EVACUATE TELL ZAATAR AND NABAA, POSITIONS THEY WOULD VERY MUCH LIKE TO OCCUPY. HOWEVER, IF PLO DOES NOT EVACUATE THE METN AAS PART OF THE CEASEFIRE (AS THEY HAVE INDICATED THEY MIGHT), CHRISTIANS MAY BE UNABLE TO RESIST TEMPTATION TO REOPEN THEIR OFFENSIVE IN THAT AREA.

6. LEBANESE LEFTISTS (JUNBLATT AND HIS ALLIES) ARE ALSO UNHAPPY WITH LATEST AGREEMENT BUT HAVE SO FAR BEEN RELUCTANT TO ATTACK IT OPENLY IN ORDER NOT TO OFFEND THEIR MODERATE PALESTINIAN ALLIES. BOTH JUNBLATT AND MODERATE LEBANESE ELEMENTS (EDDE AND SALAM) CONTINUE TO INSIST THAT SYRIA MUST WITHDRAW ITS ARMY, A SUBJECT THAT IS NOT MENTIONED IN THE CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT. SINCE ASSAD HAS MADE CLEAR ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT HE HAS NO INTENTION OF DOING SO, THESE GROUPS WILL NOT FEEL BOUND BY AN AGREEMENT THEY DID NOT SIGN.

7. THE ONE HOPE FOR DAMAASCUS CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT IS ITS VAGUENESS. THE PUBLISHED DOCUMENT SETS NO DATE FOR CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT AND DOES NOT DEFINE WITH ANY PRECISION WHO IS TO DO WHAT IN TEN-DAY PERIOD PROVIDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CEASEFIRE. ALTHOUGH THE AGREEMENT SAYS LEBANESE-SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN COMMITTEE WILL BE FORMED "IMMEDIATELY,"

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THIS COULD TAKE A LONG TIME. PARA 3 OF AGREEMENT (SEE REFTEL) SAYS THAT "PRESIDENT ELIAS SARKIS" WILL CHAIR A NATIONAL DIALOGUE, SUGGESTING THAT IT MAY NOT BEGIN UNTIL SARKIS IS OFFICIALLY INAUGURATED AS PRESIDENT. (SARKIS IS NOT REFERRED TO AS PRESIDENT-ELECT AS HE IS IN PARA 2.) IF ALL PARTIES TO LEBANESE WAR WERE HONESTLY SEEKING TO FIND WAY OUT OF CURRENT MAZE, LATEST CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT MIGHT PROVIDE A LOOSE FRAMEWORK FOR A START. AT THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, NONE APPEARS TO THINK THAT THE END IS IN SIGHT.

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